WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE SECTOR UPDATE – JANUARY 2007

SECTOR OVERVIEW

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs are often central components of emergency interventions funded by USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) in the wake of rapid-onset disasters and during complex emergencies. In the initial stages of a disaster response, WASH interventions are critical determinants for survival, as affected populations are more susceptible to illness and death from water- and sanitation-related diseases. Such diseases are often due to inadequate water supplies and sanitation, as well as poor hygiene. WASH interventions include well and latrine construction, hand washing promotion, and education on safe water usage and healthy sanitation practices. Through WASH programming, USAID helps reduce morbidity and mortality associated with water- and sanitation-related diseases and poor environmental conditions.

In fiscal year (FY) 2006, USAID/OFDA provided more than $86.4 million to fund WASH programs. Approximately $37.4 million supported interventions in Sudan, with the remaining amount supporting projects in other parts of Africa as well as in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. To promote sustainability, USAID/OFDA links emergency activities with transition and development programs funded by other offices in USAID and incorporates institutional partners such as local governments in program planning and implementation.

Ugandan children in Pader Camp use a hand-washing site provided by USAID/OFDA (Jack Myer, USAID).

SAVING LIVES IN NORTHERN UGANDA

From January to July 2005, more than 25,000 people in northern Uganda died in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). In some camps, poor sanitation conditions and inadequate or contaminated water rendered residents easy targets for water- and sanitation-related diseases such as malaria and diarrhea. In Kitgum District's Potika Camp, for example, drilling enough boreholes within the camp's secure perimeter was impossible. A small number of boreholes within the camp, combined with insecurity and curfew hours that limited the population's access to water points outside the camp, led to an insufficient water supply for camp residents.

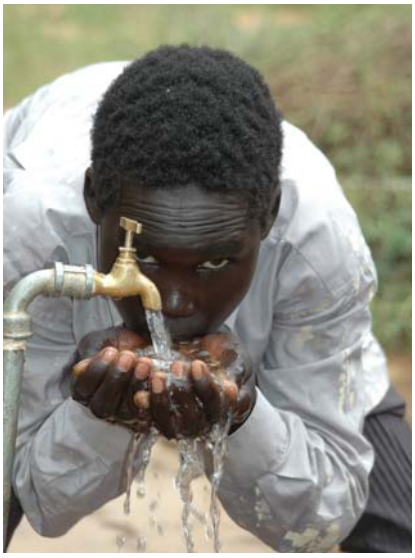
To address urgent humanitarian needs, USAID/OFDA funded implementing partner International Rescue Committee to construct a system that fed water from outside the camp to access points inside the security zone. As a result, the 14,400 camp inhabitants gained access to more than 15 liters of potable water per person per day, the minimum humanitarian standard. Community participation in the project was crucial in securing land for the well, designing the distribution system, and providing system maintenance and management. Camp residents like Aluku Betty are grateful for the new system, noting that it has improved their lives. "Even past 7 p.m.," Aluku Betty said, "when we are not allowed outside the camp, I will be able to collect water. I will have enough water for my family now."

Reducing Conflict in Sudan

Approximately 3.7 million IDPs currently live in Southern Sudan, with this number diminishing slowly as people return home during the implementation of the peace agreement. Much of the IDP population has been living in crowded camps, where the humanitarian community has struggled to provide life-sustaining resources. Scarcity of boreholes in parts of the Upper Nile State forces IDPs to use available hand pumps almost 24 hours a day. Large groups of people queuing for water lead to conflicts at water points. As IDPs return to areas of origin, tension over access to water continues.

PACT, one of USAID/OFDA's largest WASH partners in Southern Sudan, has strengthened sector coordination efforts and increased construction of new water points. In so doing, this organization has mitigated water-related conflict significantly, ensuring that rival ethnicities, communities, and towns receive equal access to water. According to PACT, local authorities have observed a perceptible reduction in conflict over access to this resource. As programming shifts to help people re-establish lives in their home areas, providing equitable access to resources will be a key factor in assuring the peace outcomes.

Projects in Southern Sudan reduce the strain on scarce resources and prevent conflict by increasing access to safe drinking water (PACT).



Meeting Immediate Needs in Lebanon

The recent conflict in Lebanon resulted in significant damage to water distribution networks and household systems, affecting an estimated 1.6 million people. Bombardments directly damaged many parts of water supply systems, including wells, pumps, reservoirs, water mains, local networks, and household storage tanks. Electricity outages further exacerbated the situation, paralyzing the water supply to hundreds of villages.

Following the August 14, 2006 ceasefire, USAID/OFDA provided support to seven relief organizations and one U.N. agency to carry out WASH interventions throughout the country. To implement the projects, partner organizations worked closely with local municipalities as well as the South Lebanon Water Establishment, which manages and maintains the water supply systems in southern Lebanon. Implementing partners identified more than 230 villages for water projects and anticipated that interventions would reach nearly 600,000 people throughout the country. USAID/OFDA-funded programs include delivering 48 generators to public facilities such as schools and health clinics, and repairing or replacing water reservoirs, pumps, pipelines, and other key components of nearly 60 community water systems.

Other USAID/OFDA WASH Activities

- In 2005, the U.N. introduced the cluster approach to improve coordination among U.N. agencies, implementing partners, and donors in complex emergencies and rapid-onset disasters. USAID/OFDA funds WASH cluster activities, and USAID/OFDA staff actively participate in cluster strategy meetings to improve this vital coordination mechanism.
- USAID/OFDA uses high-capacity water purification units, with a 4,000 gallon per hour output, to supply water in emergency contexts. Technical specialists are currently designing a new system that is more compact, more mobile, easier to use, less expensive, and more efficient than current water purification units.
- In conjunction with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, USAID/OFDA plans to support various research projects in FY 2007. One possible project will analyze the most effective point-of-use water purification products in emergency contexts. Another potential project will investigate the public health impact of hand washing promotion at the household versus the communal level.